

Cuéntame un cuento [Tell Me a Story]: Bridging Family Literacy Traditions with School Literacy

The linguistic and cultural connections in a family storytelling event link literacy practices in Mexican American homes with those found in school.

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Evangelina: *Dime un cuento, ándale, dime un cuento, abuelita.*

Mamá Julia: *Había un gato con las patas de trapo y los ojos alrevés, ¿Quieres que te lo cuente otra vez?*

Evangelina: *No, no, ese no es un cuento; dime uno de, de veras.*

Mamá Julia: *Había un gato con las patas de trapo y los ojos alrevés, ¿Quieres que te lo cuente otra vez?*

Evangelina: *No, no, un cuento bien largo, como el de los tres changuitos.*

Mamá Julia: *Ahora sí, te cuento un cuento.*

[Child: Tell me a story, come on, tell me a story, Grandma.

Grandmother: *Once upon a time there was a cat with paws made from scraps and his eyes were inside out. Do you want me to tell it to you again?*

Child: *No, that's not a story; tell me a real one.*

Grandmother: *Once upon a time there was a cat with paws made from scraps and his eyes were inside out. Do you want me to tell it to you again?*

Child: *No, no, a very long story, like the one about the three monkeys.*

Grandmother: *Now, I can tell you a story. Once upon a time. . .]*

This vignette reflects a Mexican American family tradition of telling stories and the role of inter-generational experiences in fostering a child's enjoyment of stories. Families have the desire and the experiences to tell stories. As elder members share the experiences and cultural knowledge of the family, their storytelling contributes to the language and literacy development of their children. Parents who recount childhood experiences in the form of cuentos [stories] to their offspring are sharing their life knowledge as well as establishing codes of behavior and social parameters. In this way, storytelling is a tool of socialization through which ideals, perspectives, and cultural mores are passed down to future generations (Fiese, Hooker, Kotary, Schwagler, & Rimmer, 1995). Thus, storytelling is an

avenue through which families can develop literacy.

Despite the multiple benefits of storytelling, this activity is not often used in classrooms. Few teachers encourage the families of their students to share their stories with their children. Moreover, those parents and relatives who do are usually unaware of the valuable connections between storytelling and the activities of the school. To enhance the parents' and teachers' knowledge regarding the connections between home and school literacy practices, we designed a five-day parent institute during the month of April. The participants included family members of 3- and 4-year-old children from an inner-city school's preschool program. Seventy-three family members, such as moms and dads (some with their infants and toddlers), grandparents, and a couple of older siblings participated during the institute. The majority were Mexican American, Spanish-dominant, and had varying levels of education and literacy. Teachers, school staff (even the cafeteria ladies sat in the back and listened attentively), and university students were also present. For the purpose of this article, we focus on the fourth session and those activities that explored storytelling for language and literacy development. Understanding family literacy practices allows teachers to use children's knowledge for academic tasks. The development of stories as

well as storytelling constitutes important practices in school. By capitalizing and building on the knowledge that children have, teachers can successfully help children achieve the literacy expectations of the school.

Mexican American families exhibit a rich literacy knowledge, and we wanted to demonstrate how that knowledge can be linked with school literacy. Our reflections on field-notes, audiotape transcripts, and photographs revealed that as families participated in this institute, they experienced a collaborative and imaginative group process related to the development and telling of stories. This process, which included the use of a questioning strategy often used by teachers in early childhood programs, resulted in seven unique stories—four in Spanish, one in English, and two with both English and Spanish versions—from which linguistic and cultural connections emerged. The families enjoyed the experience of getting together to engage in storytelling that reflected their cultural knowledge, and the experience gave us a basis for documenting the value of the school–family literacy connection. Tormenta Elementary, where we conducted our parent institute, is a 75-year-old school surrounded by public housing. Discount stores, Mexican restaurants, and a few government offices can be found around the neighborhood. The noise from highway traffic and freight trains can be heard from the campus. Although the school is close to a busy intersection, many parents walk their children to school. Others drop them off in their cars. Still other children take the school bus.

The school welcomes children with brightly decorated hallways, smiling attentive teachers, and classroom curricula that reflect the children's language and culture. The principal

understands that in this community, issues of hunger, safety, social acceptance, and language access are ever-present concerns. Tormenta Elementary tries to address these needs by providing resources such as parent workshops on a variety of topics (e.g., health, legal rights, par-

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enting skills, ESL classes) and a dual language program. Indeed, the faculty and staff strive to create a school climate that is supportive of the community (Clark, Flores, Riojas-Cortez, & Smith, 2002).

THE PARENT INSTITUTE

Our goal for the parent institute was to identify the family's literacy traditions and connect them with the school's literacy. Every morning for a week, we gathered with the parents in the school's multipurpose cafeteria for two hours. Before the sessions began, we were able to converse with the parents and their toddlers as we drank coffee and ate pan dulce (Mexican pastry) and other breakfast treats provided by the school. This type of interaction allowed us to build trust and create a bond that helped us in the presentation of the institute.

Each day, families engaged in activities organized around themes to raise awareness of the potential for literacy learning within common life activities. These themes included morning routines, grocery shopping, the *merienda* or snack time, storytelling, and weekend activities (Riojas-Cortez, Flores, & Clark, in press). Such themes form part of a child's daily routine and include literacy events that are often not taken into consideration at school (Smith & Elish-Piper, 2002). During the first

hour of each session, while the children were in their classrooms, parents became involved in interactive learning and demonstration. During the second hour, they applied that learning in a variety of activities with their children (Riojas-Cortez et al.).

The storytelling session emphasized the importance of telling stories to children for language and literacy development. To build the parents' interest for the storytelling session, one of the presenters described her childhood memories of the neighborhood storyteller. Vividly, she told the parents how one neighbor would gather all the children at her house to tell traditional Mexican American legends and stories:

Todos los niños de la vecindad se juntaban para escuchar las leyendas. Después llegábamos a la casa todos asustados, pero nos gustaba, ¡como queríamos ir a escuchar estas leyendas!

[All the neighborhood children would gather around to listen to the legends. Afterwards, we would get home completely scared, but we liked it so much that we were always ready to go back to listen to those legends.]

Sharing her storytelling experience with the parents assisted in creating a cultural connection with them. It also described a rich intergenerational literacy event involving storytelling.

After the story, we asked the parents to reminisce about the stories that they heard when they were young: "¿Qué tipo de cuentos les contaban sus padres?" [What type of stories did your parents tell you?] In unison, the parents responded La

Llorona [Weeping Woman]. Other responses included Caperucita Roja [Little Red Ridding Hood], Cenicienta [Cinderella], Ricitos de Oro [Goldilocks], El Gato con Botas [Puss in Boots], and El León y el Ratón [The Lion and the Mouse]. In South Texas, most Mexican American children have heard these stories, legends, and fables from family members or neighbors. Unique to the leyendas is that the stories are often adapted or modified to make them credible to the community in which the leyenda is told. For example, as mentioned by the parents, an infamous leyenda is La Llorona, the Weeping Woman. For children living in San Antonio, Texas, La Llorona drowns her children in the San Antonio River and only comes out in the evening wailing for her missing children. For children living near the Rio Grande, they might be told that the Weeping Woman is heard along the Rio Grande crying for her drowned children.

PARENTS AS STORYTELLERS

As the session continued, parents were asked, “¿De dónde podemos sacar cuentos? [Where do we get stories from?].” Parents recognized that we get stories from books, the community, experiences, and things that happened to us. As Koehnecke (2000) indicates, there are different types of stories to tell, such as folk and fairy tales, as well as personal ones or those created from the environment. In telling the stories, we pointed out that many storytellers choose to adapt or change its plot. To demonstrate such adaptations, a parody of The Gingerbread Man was presented in Spanish. The cuento [story] was titled El Marranito de Jengibre or The Gingerbread Pig. The Spanish version included culturally relevant items such as the marranito, a type of pan dulce in the shape of a pig found in many

panaderías [bakeries] that many Mexican American families visit daily. The characters were depicted as the neighbors who are usually part of the everyday life of many families. The parents’ facial expressions, laughter, and applause indicated that they thoroughly enjoyed the story adaptation.

At this juncture, the discussion was directed at how children develop early literacy skills through storytelling. Using The Gingerbread Pig as an example, the literacy elements of a story were presented and explained to the parents. The discussion centered on the characters, the setting, the motive, the actions, and the conclusion. Palmer, Leiste, James, and Ellis (2000) state that, “storytelling is one way to introduce students to the parts of a story that can be found in all literature” (p. 3). Since the goal of this session was to convey the importance of storytelling for language and literacy development, sharing the story elements with the parents offered them a structure to follow while making the connection between home and school literacy.

Parents were challenged to think of a story to tell their child. To prompt

young.] We told the parents that they could create stories about anything they liked, even things found around the house, and asked them to think of a story to tell their child. They were encouraged to think of themselves as storytellers like their mothers, grandmothers, and neighbors who used to tell them leyendas, cuentos, and fabulas from the Mexican American storytelling tradition.

We provided stuffed animals to encourage original story creations. These props prompted ideas and stimulated creativity. With partners or in groups, parents worked to develop their stories. The fact that most parents had similar cultural backgrounds (Mexican or Mexican American) allowed them to share experiences that were used as a springboard for working together.

As parents excitedly worked in groups and brainstormed ideas, some expressed a need to write down details. The parents asked for markers and paper, telling us, “Después que terminamos el cuento, lo pasamos a un papel grande.” [After we finish the story, we’ll write it on a large sheet of paper.] Parents indicated that they wanted to keep a copy of

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parents to think about what stories children liked, they were asked, “¿Qué tipo de cuentos le gustan a los niños?” [What type of stories do children like?] The parents answered, “De lo que está en el medio ambiente, cuentos mágicos de princesas, bíblicos, y de cuando eramos chicos.” [About the environment, fairy tales about princesses, Bible stories, and about when we were

the story to share with their other children. The parents then became involved in the task of brainstorming, editing, and publishing the final draft on large chart tablets.

The Imaginative Process

While brainstorming, the parents enthusiastically suggested different characters, actions, and settings. They called it “proceso de la imagi-

nación,” the imaginative process. For example, the following excerpt shows a group of parents trying to develop the character and the plot of their story about a playful and disobedient monkey named Máscara:

Mrs. Pérez: *Había una vez un changuito llamado Máscara. [Once upon a time there was a monkey named Máscara.]*

Mrs. Vela: *Pero vamos a ponerle otro nombre [Let's give him another name.]*

(The parents could not decide on another name for the monkey and continued developing the plot.)

Mrs. Gómez: *Action . . . ah! ¿Qué podemos poner? [What can we say?] He came to trouble.*

Mrs. López: *Maybe a snake? Maybe going to water? Or we can say, we placed him in the jungle, the Amazonas [Amazon]. He's passing and playing across the bridge.*

Mrs. Vela: *So, he got scared because he remembered he did not know . . . he go beyond he supposed to go.*

In this excerpt, we note that as the parents constructed the story, their language differences—most parents spoke Spanish, others English, and some were bilingual—did not interfere with the creation of the story. Rather, they developed a series of adventures for the monkey that children would find engaging.

Another interesting feature of this imaginative process was the interaction that occurred among the parents in each group. Parents laughed and joked as they developed their story. One of the groups that developed a story about a trip to the zoo laughed as they made choices regarding the sequence of the story:

Mrs. Hernández: *El sábado los llevaron y al entrar primero. . . . [They took them on Saturday and after they first entered. . . .]*

Mrs. Garza: *Un día . . . compraron sus boletos y se van a su casa, y ¿ya? ¿Este cuento se ha acabado? [One day . . . they bought their tickets and they went home? And that's it? This story has ended?] [Laughing]*

Mrs. García: *Se me hace que necesitamos más. [I think we need more.]*

Mrs. Garza: *Un día unos padres de familia se pusieron de acuerdo para llevar a sus hijos al zoológico el siguiente sábado. Y cuando se llegó el sábado los llevaron y a la entrada pagaron sus boletos y luego empezaron a pasearse. . . . [One day some parents got together to take their children to the zoo the following Saturday. And when Saturday came, they took them to the entrance and they paid for their tickets and began to go around. . . .]*

These parents knew that the story needed to follow a logical sequence. For instance, Mrs. Garza, in a humorous manner, told the group that the story line was out of sequence. In other words, they needed to use the elements of the story in sequence in order for their story to make sense, but they used humor, indicating that they were thoroughly enjoying the creative process.

Linguistic and Cultural Connections

Most of the stories developed by the parents began with the traditional Spanish and English literary form of “Había una vez” or “Once upon a time.” The stories developed in Spanish signaled the ending of the story with a traditional Spanish rhyme, *Y colorín colorado este cuento se ha acabado* [and red ridden, this story has ended], instead of the English ending, *The End*. The use of these literary features and literacy patterns, whether in Spanish or in English, exposes children to grammatical forms they need in school (Palmer et al., 2000). Moreover, the incorporation of the

various literary forms reveals the cultural heritage of the storytellers. We also noticed that like *fabulas*, most of the stories created by the

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parents had a moral or lesson to be learned. For example, “The Disobedient Monkey” is a story that has a moral value in which the mother warns the child about the consequences of not obeying:

She warned Máscara not to play in that area, ever again: “You could fall in the water and there are many different fish including piranhas,” said his mom. . . . He runs home, tells his mother what happened, and promises he would never disobey her again.

This particular group initially developed the story orally in Spanish. However, as they edited and revised the story, the parents decided they could also tell it in English. In the final draft, the group’s scribe translated the story to English. The Disobedient Monkey story is an example of collaboration around literacy events, community bilingualism, and shared cultural values.

Another story with a moral was *El Camello Solitario* (The Lonely Camel):

Caminó por muchos días cansado y agotado, pero con mucha ilusión de encontrar a ese amiguito tan deseado. De pronto encontró una ardilla en el bosque que estaba mal herida, se la subió a su lomo y la llevó a tomar agua. . . . Y en el camino se empezaron a juntar otros animalitos. Cuando se dio cuenta, él estaba rodeado de muchos animalitos y se dio cuenta que no estaba solo.

[He (the camel) walked for many days tired and exhausted, but with the hope to find that one little friend he wanted so much. All of the sudden, he found a squirrel in the forest that was severely injured; he lay her on his hump and took her to get a drink of water. . . . On the way, other animals began to join them. He finally noticed that he was surrounded by many animals and realized that he was not lonely anymore.]

Mensaje: No importa que tan solo te sientas; siempre hay alguien a quien ayudar. [Message: It doesn't matter how alone you feel; there's always somebody you can help.]

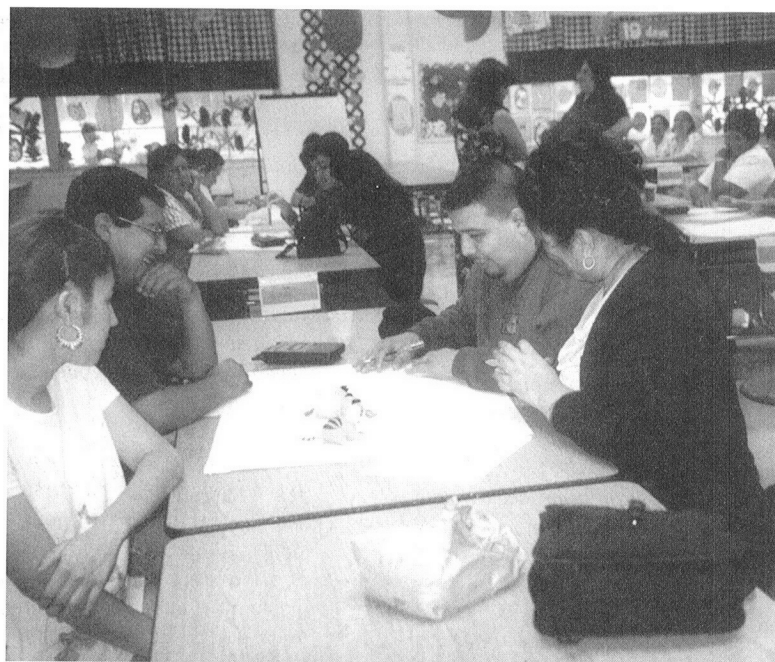
It was interesting to note that the parents, after completing the story, included the moral of the story. The message clearly explains the purpose of the story and underscores an important value of the Mexican American culture.

Even when stories were created originally in English, as in "Along Came a Spider," the group embedded a moral within the story as is exemplified in this selection:

While in the jungle, he met a large purple legged, green bodied, yellow headed spider with big old teeth. His name was Roger. Roger told Jeremy, the tiger, "I have bigger eyes to explore with than you," but the tiger said, "I am way bigger than you," he explained. The spider said, "Oh, but do your eyes light up at night like mine?"

As they both compared their differences, they realized exploring together would be a lot more fun. Considering the tiger's quickness and strength and the spider's big eyes, exploring together would be an even greater adventure.

While developing their story, this group, led by a father, discussed how children often taunt each other and the importance of getting along. Thus, the parents often in-



clude a moral, a long-standing tradition in storytelling.

Several groups created their stories in English as well as Spanish. The way the parents selected language depended on their proficiency level in either language. Most parents chose to create stories in Spanish, even though some could do it in English. The following excerpt shows a story about three animals (a lion, a duck, and a bear) that were initially scared of each other but found out that they could be friends after helping each other. Although the story line in English and Spanish is the same, the Spanish version had greater details and was much more expressive:

Pues vino el patito y le dijo, "A ver yo te ayudo." Y el león le hacía, "Ay me duele, me duele". So, le quitó la espinita con su piquito mientras el osito le de decía, "Está bien ten calma, ten calma, no te vamos a hacer daño" Y en eso le dijo el león, "Yo quiero jugar con ustedes." Y el oso dijo, "Bueno pues todos podemos ser amiguitos," y desde entonces todos siguen jugando juntos.

The group told the story in English in the following manner:

The duck pulled the sticker out with his beak while the bear held the lion down. The lion let out a great big roar (rrrrrr) the lion felt good and said thank you to the bear and the duck all three became friends and lived happily together in the woods.

In the Spanish version, the animals are personified and have speaking roles. The details of the story come alive in what each character says, such as when the lion says, "Oh, it hurts, it hurts me" and the bear comforts him by saying, "It's okay, calm down, be calm, we won't hurt you." It was apparent that the parents could express themselves in a more elaborate and creative manner using Spanish. In addition, the narrator used the diminutive form in describing the character's qualities. For example, the duck helped remove a splinter from the bear's paw: "El patito le quitó la espinita con su piquito y el osito le decía. . . . [The duckling took the little splinter out with his little beak and the little bear told him. . . .]

The diminutive is more than just a language qualifier; it is a linguistic mechanism through which parents were able to convey social intimacy with their children. It showed warmth and expressed greater emotion. As Annandale and Stucky (1995) indicate, storytellers allow others to better know them as individuals, "to know not only the facts of their lives, but the feelings as well" (p. 1).

This story excerpt is also an example of parents using linguistic elements of greater complexity in their stronger language than they would be able to use in English. Although children must know this type of linguistic form for school purposes, parents who are Spanish-dominant may not know how to create the equivalent of this form in English. The findings demonstrate that constructing stories in the native language allows for creativity in storytelling. As research has shown, when bilinguals are given the opportunity to write in their first language, there is a tendency to produce richer texts than those created in second language (Moll, 1990).

The Act of Storytelling

Storytelling is a multifaceted and vibrant interactive experience between the speaker and the listener (Turner & Oaks, 1997). One group of parents decided to tell their story while sitting their children on their laps. In addition, the parents used different ways of engaging the children in the story.

For instance, in the group that developed the zoo story, the storyteller drew on the children's prior experiences at the zoo:

Parent Storyteller: *Les voy a contrar un cuento. [I'm going to tell you a story.]*

Children: *0000000000.*

Parent Storyteller: *¿Se acuerdan cuando fuimos al zoológico? ¿Qué vimos? (Prompts by showing a monkey and saying) ¿Un changuito? [Remember when we went to the zoo? What did we see? A monkey?]*

Child: *Uno mono. [A monkey.]*

Parent Storyteller: *Muy bien, un mono, y, ¿Qué comen los monos? [Very good, and what do monkeys eat?]*

Children: *Plátanos. [Bananas.]*

Parent Storyteller: *Muy bien, ahora sí. Había un vez, que un día. . . [Very good, now we can begin. Once upon a time, one day. . .]*

This example demonstrates that parents used school-type questions to capture the children's interest in the story. We are not sure if the parents were aware that this type of questioning enhances children's cognitive development. This could be studied further in other situations. The importance of this type of questioning technique is that parents helped children make connections to their own life experiences and at the same time enhanced their cognitive development. In other words, parents demonstrated specific be-

haviors that indicated their understanding of the elements of storytelling and other processes of social interaction. "The real value of storytelling from a cognitive perspective is that it becomes a mutual creation involving interaction and understanding between teller and listener" (Abramson, 1998, p. 441).

Some parents used the "written copy" of their story as a script, yet they embellished the story as they were telling it. The original story line read: "Y lo que les llamó mucho la atención fueron dos clases de animales en especial. Uno que se llama hipopótamo porque estaba muy grande y dentro del agua." [And what they noticed was two types of animals in particular. One that is called hippopotamus; he was very big and was in the water.] The storyteller embellished it: "El hipopótamo era bien grande y estaba sumergido debajo del agua y andaba nadando, nadando y nadando con una gracia y era muy feliz. [The hippopotamus was very big and was submerged in the water and was swimming, swimming and swimming with a lot of grace and was very happy.] This example shows how excellence in literacy is



characterized by one's ability to embellish the story or the printed word (Heath, 1983).

Some parents used the animals as props, while others acted out the story and used different voices and background noises to attract their children's attention. In both instances, the story was embellished as it was told. One group of parents sat their children in front of them as they began to tell a story about a lion, a duck, and a bear that became friends. The children were the audience and the parents were the actors. The parents in this group decided to first tell the story in English and later in Spanish. One parent was the narrator and the rest of the parents were the different characters. As the narrator told the story, the other parents began to roar, quack, growl, and flap wings. They used artistry, vivid language, and expressive voice:

Once upon a time there was three little animals, a lion, a duck, and a bear. One day as the duck was in the pond he heard a noise a lot of noise [loud growling grrrrhhh] he got frightened and started moving his wings [flapping arms to make wings sound]. A great big mean looking bear jumped out of the bushes [parent jumps] he tried to get the duck's attention but the duck was afraid and he ran [parent runs away].

This type of dramatic interpretation changed the task to an activity that exhibited not only the parents' creativity, but also their enthusiasm and interest in presenting their stories. In addition, the children became a part of the story by making sounds and noises during the performance. Some parents spontaneously asked different questions at the end of the story, as shown in the following example:

Parent: *¿Te gusto el cuento? [Did you like the story?]*



Child: *Sí. [Yes]*

Parent: *¿De qué se trató el cuento? [What was the story about?]*

Child: *Del oso, del león, y del pato. [About a bear, a lion, and a duck.]*

Parent: *¿En qué quedaron al fin? [What happened?]*

Child: *Eran amiguitos. [They became friends.]*

Again, the parents' questioning demonstrated a natural approach to teaching of scaffolding via spontaneous questioning to assist the children's comprehension. Morrow (2001) asserts that interactions, questioning, and talk about a story are important components of the event because such conversations promote children's meaning making. Although the noise level in the cafeteria was high, all the children attentively and enthusiastically listened to their parents' story while munching on popcorn. Their engagement was evident in their beaming smiles, bright eyes, and laughter. Such enthusiasm often prompted the parents to elaborate

more on the story or produce story innovations. Elaborations and innovations are important aspects of the storytelling experience, which made each telling fresh and new.

What Parents Learned from the Session

After engaging in a storytelling activity, the parents shared the importance of communicating with their children. When asked, "¿Qué aprendieron del taller hoy?" [What did you learn from the workshop today?], the parents answered: *podemos ser creativos [we can be creative], podemos crear fantasía con nuestra imaginación [we can create fantasy with our imagination], la comunicación directa es importante con los cuentos y no toma mucho tiempo [direct communication is important for telling stories and telling stories does not take too much time].*

One parent's reflection addressed the significance of engaging with children in a creative and communicative act:

Y el hecho de que compartir por ejemplo aparte de que hayamos in-

ventado o no la historia, de compartir este momento con nuestros hijos para ellos es muy significativo. Es muy importante la comunicación directa con el hijo y el papá.

[The fact that we shared, for example, whether we created the story or not, sharing this moment with our children, it is very significant for them. Direct communication between parent and child is very important.]

Indeed, storytelling is a social-interactive act that results in the linguistic, cultural, and cognitive development of the child (Palmer et al., 2000). Storytelling also stimulates children socially and emotionally as they interact with their parents.

Acknowledging parents as storytellers also prompted emotion. All eagerly received copies of their stories. Several parents stated that their children were surprised that they knew how to create and tell stories. They further noted how proud their children were of them. The principal later recalled:

What I noticed was that parents were very proud that what they did at home contributed to their children's school knowledge, and I felt that they had a sense of connection to the school, a sense of community. Parents have always been part of our school, but our relationship was strengthened by this experience.

Parents said that they felt comfortable telling their stories to their children and that it was not as difficult as they thought. Most of them indicated that they needed to tell their children stories at night rather than letting them go to sleep watching television.

BRIDGING MEXICAN AMERICAN FAMILY LITERACY TRADITIONS WITH SCHOOL LITERACY

The storytelling session revealed the cultural traditions of the families. While the use of Spanish in the sto-

rytelling validated the linguistic and cultural features of the home as a valued element for bridging home and school knowledge, some parents also wanted to tell the stories in English, the perceived language of schooling. It is not uncommon in bilingual communities within the U.S. for English to be seen as the language of status, and as such, for parents to recognize the importance of their children becoming bilingual (Smith, 1999; Smith & Heckman, 1995). After one of the groups told their story in English, we asked if they were done with their task. The parents responded, "No, ahora lo tenemos que hacer en español." [No, we now have to do it in Spanish]. In this manner, parents convey their language values to their children. Undoubtedly, the experience was beneficial for both parents and children. As storytellers, the parents' expressive style intrigued their children. Children were eager for their parents to tell them another cuento, which gave the parents a sense of accomplishment.

In elementary schools, educators ask children to write their own stories or to tell their stories to classmates. While some children successfully perform this task, others find it difficult because their style does not coincide with the way stories are written or told at school (Heath, 1983). When children come from homes where English is the second language, there is not only a cultural but also a linguistic mismatch. This mismatch between the home and the school can create a discontinuity in the literacy development of the child (Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992). Often such homes are considered illiterate because the literacy is in the native language or because books are not found in the home. Wiley (1989/1990) proposes that disregard for native language literacy reinforces the stigma that individuals are undereducated, non-

productive, or unable to function. According to Baydar, Brooks-Gunn, and Furstenberg (1993), the family factors found to be predictive of literacy include maternal education, family size during early childhood, maternal marital status, and income in middle childhood and early adolescence—not language. The respect and use of the native language promotes parents' understanding of the importance of their family's literacy practices in relation to school literacy. By encouraging parents to use their native language for their family's literacy practices,

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educators also show that traditional cultural practices, such as telling cuentos, can support school practices. When teaching practices at school reflect the teaching practices of the home, children feel more comfortable and are more likely to succeed. As Okagaki and Diamond (2000) indicate, rather than telling parents what to do at home, as educators, we should ask them "how we can complement their efforts" (p. 78). In fact, Evans, Shaw, and Bell (2000) state that, "literacy related activities at home influence children's reading achievement through the development of vocabulary, letter name knowledge, and early print concepts (e.g., spacing, direction of print)" (p. 66). Our storytelling session with parents demonstrated that culturally and linguistically diverse parents are interested in and capable of supporting

their children's literacy development. Parents want their children to become successful, literate individuals and to develop the values and traditions of their cultural heritage.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WORKING WITH PARENTS

The relationships that were formed during this institute were very important to its success. We had to get to know the parents at a personal level to understand their experiences, traditions, beliefs, customs, literacy, but most of all their families. As Brilliant (2001) indicates, "language and cultural issues impact the type and frequency of parental involvement" (p. 251).

The teachers' interactions with the families as well as observations during the parent institute resulted in a reflection of their beliefs:

Sandra: *I felt that many of my parents thought that their children learned everything in school, but after the workshop, many of my parents learned that they are their child's first teacher.*

Leticia: *I was shocked that our students' parents truly believed that the teacher was the sole educator.*

The teachers also made a list of recommendations for future workshops and for teachers in general:

Leticia: *I would have more than one [workshop] so parents have a wealth of ideas to draw from. Teachers can also offer a greater variety of ideas.*

Minerva: *Parents may be more involved in the learning process knowing that education starts at home.*

Sandra: *I would conduct similar workshops because many of our parents don't realize that they can use everyday household items to teach. I would also send home monthly newsletters explaining activi-*

Research on Connecting Family and Community Literacy to School Literacy

Hammond, L. (2001). Notes from California: An Anthropological Approach to Urban Science Education for Language Minority Families. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, 38(9), 983–999.

- Through critical ethnography, children, teachers, and student teachers gathered community funds of knowledge about science to study in the classroom for the purpose of generating community materials that complemented standards-based curricula. The study illustrates how, by drawing on participants' funds of knowledge, a new kind of multiscience can emerge, one accessible to all collaborating members and responsive to school standards.

Olmedo, I. (1997). Voices of our Past: Using Oral History to Explore Funds of Knowledge within a Puerto Rican Family. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 28, 550–573.

- This case study focuses on the use of oral history to explore funds of knowledge and family literacy practices within a Puerto Rican family. The pedagogical uses of these oral histories and literacies are discussed as a way to restructure school curricula and challenge assumptions about Latino families.

Spielman, J. (2001). The Family Photography Project: "We Will Just Read What the Pictures Tell Us." *The Reading Teacher*, 54(8), 762–700.

- This study highlights a family photography project on the home experiences of Hispanic-American families as part of literacy education. Family participants became more conscious of the value of their home lives within education and as transformative experiences for literacy instruction.

—Karen Smith

ties they can do at home with their child.

These teachers understood the crucial role they play with the family, not only with the child. Teachers want the parents to know that they are "critical agents in their children's educational attainment and achievement" (Smith & Elish-Piper, 2002, p. 57).

Recommendations when working with culturally and linguistically diverse parents include:

- Plan a parent institute or workshop, not only to engage the interests of

parents (Pérez, 2001), but to acknowledge that parents can use their own cultural knowledge to make connections with the topic being discussed.

- Provide opportunities for parents to exhibit teaching approaches and styles, so that we bridge that knowledge with school activities (Lesar, Espinosa, & Diaz, 1997).
- Allow parents to bring their infants and toddlers rather than offer babysitting, particularly for a session on storytelling. Emphasize that chil-

dren begin the process of becoming literate at a very early age.

- Share personal experiences and ask parents to share stories that they were told when they were young. Make a list of those stories and find differences and similarities to celebrate diversity.
- Write down parents' stories (or ask parents to write them down) and create a "storytelling book" for home literacy bags (Barbour, 1998/1999), giving families the opportunity to share one another's stories. Include props that go with the stories for families who wish to use them.
- Provide different opportunities for families to tell stories in the classroom. The more children are exposed to storytelling experiences, the greater their "attention span, listening skills, accuracy of recall, better sense of sequencing, predicting, and fluency in writing" (Speaker, 2000, p. 184).

Making connections and bridging home practices with school practices are essential to children's learning. Linguistic and cultural connections occur through storytelling, and through the interaction that occurs when developing stories. Storytelling is a literacy event often used by families to interact socially that supports the development of cognitive academic skills.

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